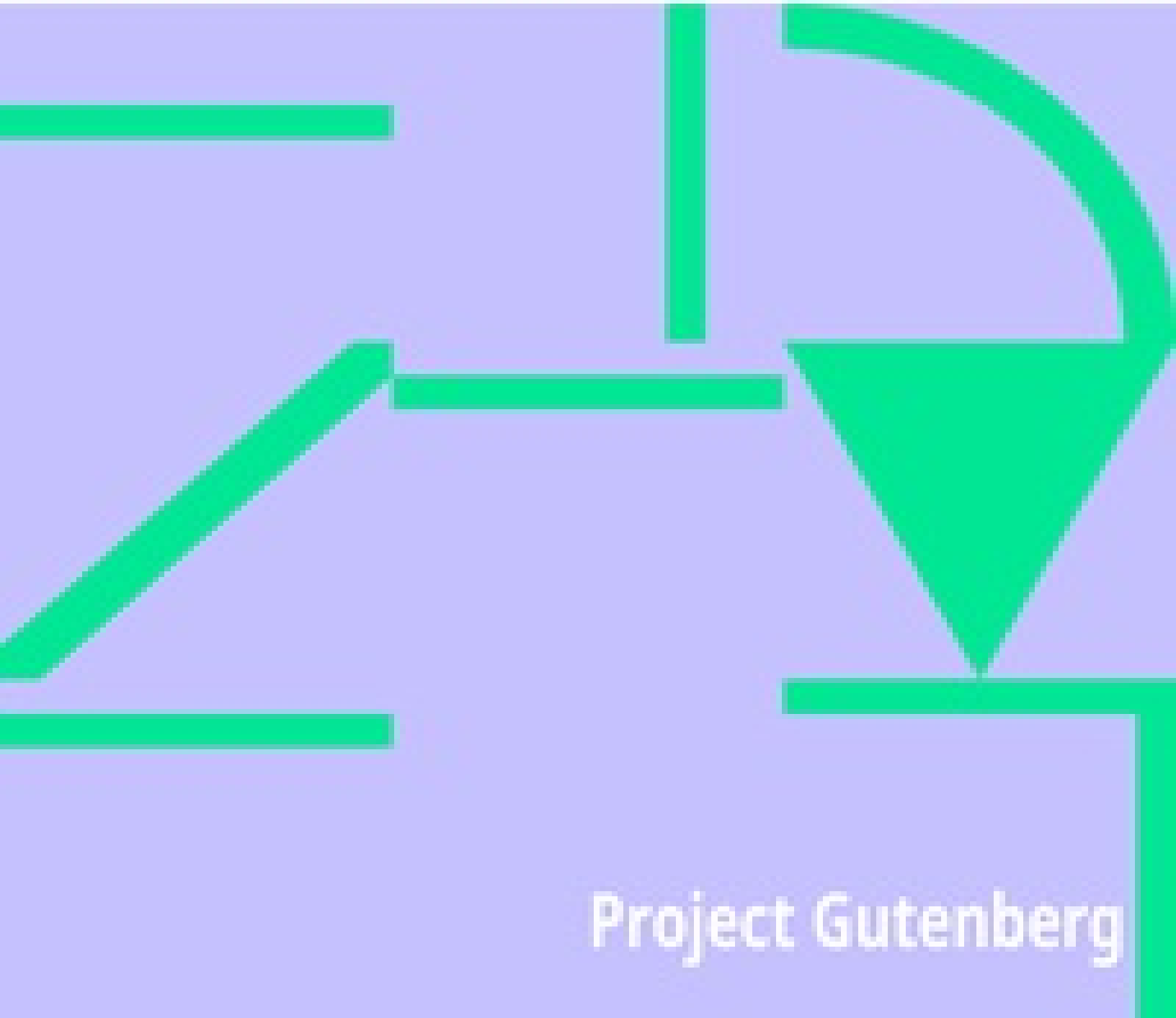
Chinese Poems



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Title: Chinese Poems

Author: Various

Translator: Charles Budd

Release Date: November 6, 2011 [EBook #37938]

Language: English

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CHINESE POEMS

TRANSLATED BY

CHARLES BUDD

HENRY FROWDE
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON, NEW YORK, TORONTO AND MELBOURNE
1912

OXFORD: HORACE HART
PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY

PREFACE

The initiative of this little book was accidental. One day in the early part of last summer, feeling weary of translating commercial documents, I opened a volume of Chinese poetry that was lying on my desk and listlessly turned over the pages. As I was doing so my eye caught sight of the phrase, 'Red rain of peach flowers fell.' That would be refreshing, I said to myself, on such a day as this; and then I went on with my work again. But in the evening I returned to the book of Chinese poetry and made a free translation of the poem in which I had seen the metaphor quoted above. The translation seemed to me and some friends pleasantly readable; so in leisure hours I have translated some more poems and ballads, and these I now venture to publish in this volume, thinking that they may interest readers in other lands, and also call forth criticism that will be useful in preparing a larger volume which I, or some better qualified scholar, may publish hereafter; for it can hardly be said that the field of Chinese poetry has been widely explored by foreign students of the Chinese language.

Many of the translations in this book are nearly literal, excepting adaptations to meet the exigencies of rhyme and rhythm; but some are expanded to enable readers to understand what is implied, as well as actually written, in the original; for, after all, the chief aim of the translator of poetry should be to create around the mind of the reader the sensory atmosphere in which the mind of the poet moved when he wrote the poem. Whether I have attained a measure of success in such a very difficult task must be decided by the readers of these translations.

It should be borne in mind by students more or less familiar with the Chinese language that there are many versions of the stories and legends related in these poems, and these versions, again, have been variously interpreted by Chinese poets. A little reflection of this kind will often save a critic from stumbling into difficulties from which it is not easy to extricate himself.

A few notes are given at the end of each poem to explain historical names, &c., but not many other notes are required as the poems explain themselves. Indeed, the truth of the saying, 'One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,' has been impressed on my mind deeply by this little excursion into the field of Chinese poetry, for the thoughts and words of such poems as the 'Journey Back,' 'A Maiden's Reverie,' 'Only a Fragrant Spray,' 'The Lady Lo-Fu, 'Conscripts leaving for the Frontier,' 'The River by Night in Spring,' 'Reflections on the Brevity of Life,' 'The Innkeeper's Wife,' 'A Soldier's Farewell to his Wife,' &c., show us that human nature two or three thousand years ago differed not a whit from human nature as it is to-day.

CHARLES BUDD.

Tung Wen Kwan Translation Office,
Shanghai, March, 1912.

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A FEW REMARKS ON THE HISTORY AND CONSTRUCTION OF CHINESE POETRY

The earliest Chinese poems which have been preserved and handed down to posterity are contained in the 'Shi-King', or Book of Poetry. Translations of this book were first made by Roman Catholic missionaries, and later by Dr. Legge whose translation, being in English, is better known.

The Shi-King contains three hundred odd poetical compositions, or odes, as they might more correctly be described, most of them being set to music and sung on official and public occasions.

But many more odes than those in the Shi-King existed at the dawn of Chinese literature. Some native scholars think that several thousand odes were composed by princes, chiefs, and other men of the numerous petty States which were included in Ancient China; and that criticism and rejection by later literary compilers, especially Confucius, reduced the number deemed worthy of approval to 305, which make up the Shi-King. It is, however, quite impossible to say how many odes were composed in that early period; many more than those preserved in the Shi-King undoubtedly were made, and we can only regret that, when later scholars began to collect and criticize these earliest poetical effusions of their ancestors, political and other motives induced them to prune or lop off whole branches of the nascent tree of poetry with such unsparing hands. Fragments of a few early odes not contained in the Shi-King remain, but such fragments are not numerous.

As to the value of these early odes critics differ widely. By some Western writers they have been compared favourably with the Psalms, the Homeric poems, &c., while other writers think that they do not rise above the most primitive simplicity. Some of the odes are undoubtedly of considerable poetical value; and all critics must acknowledge that the Shi-King contains a great deal of valuable information respecting the States of Ancient China, and the people who inhabited them in the earliest stages of their existence.

It has been necessary to give this brief account of the Shi-King because it has loomed so largely in the eyes of students of Chinese literature as to exclude from their vision the vast field of Chinese poetry in which hundreds of famous Chinese poets have, at different periods, wandered, and mused, and sung, for two or three thousand years, and their wanderings are described and their musings sung in thousands of poems which are unknown to foreign students of Chinese literature. They have heard of the Shi-King, a few even have read it; but of the great poets of China, who have in a long succession appeared and done immortal work and passed away during nearly three thousand years, they know but little or nothing at all. My object in publishing this little book is to correct this false perspective, not by assailing the Shi-King, but by bringing into view a few of the poets and a few of their poems (which can only be very inadequately set forth in translations by a writer who is not a poet), and thus make a beginning in an undertaking that will be, I hope, continued and perfected by men who have more leisure and greater poetical skill and inspiration than I possess.

After the compilation of the 300 odes by Confucius, there was a period of about one hundred years during which but little attention was given to the making of poetry. The earliest poetical compositions handed down after those preserved in the Shi-King are the 'Li-Sao' by Küh-Yuen, of the Tsu State, 280 B.C., several poems by Su-Wu and Li-ling, and nineteen poems by unknown writers. All these were composed during the Han Dynasty or earlier, and they are regarded as poetical compositions of great worth by native scholars, although they do not conform to the rules which have guided Chinese poets in writing poetry since the T'ang Dynasty. Indeed, one commentator has described their perfection as 'the seamless robe of heaven', i.e. the dome of heaven—the sky. These early poetical compositions are marked by greater simplicity of language, deeper feeling, and more naturalness than the poetry of later dynasties, which is often cramped by the highly elaborate technique introduced by the poets of the T'ang Dynasty.

'The Journey Back,' 'Only a Fragrant Spray,' 'The Swallow's Song,' 'The Innkeeper's Wife,' 'A Song of Tze-Yuh,' 'A Maiden's Reverie,' 'Su Wu's Farewell to his Wife,' 'Reflections on the Brevity of Life,' are specimens of this period.

During the later Han Dynasty, especially in the reign of Kien-An (A.D. 196), and in the reign of Hwang-T'su (A.D. 220) of the Wei Dynasty, several poets of conspicuous ability arose, and their compositions compare favourably with the three hundred odes and the ancient poems following the odes.

From the Wei Dynasty to the T'sin Dynasty, and on through the 'Luh-Chao' (Six Dynasties—the Wu, Tsing, Sung, T'si, Liang, and Chen, covering the period from A.D. 220 to 587), one poet after another gained an ascendancy and each found many imitators; but the poetry of this period is more elaborate and florid than deep and natural.

From the Chen Dynasty (A.D. 557-587) to the end of the Sui Dynasty (A.D. 589-618) there was but little good poetry produced: it was, in fact, a time of literary decadence which continued even into the beginning of the T'ang Dynasty. Then a change took place, and great poets arose who formed the T'ang School of Poetry, and the poetical technique of that school has been more or less closely copied by all writers of poetry to this day; and during the most flourishing years of the T'ang Dynasty the production of poetry was so rich and abundant that that period is regarded by the Chinese as the Golden Age of Poetry.

One native commentator has likened the development of poetry to a tree: 'The three hundred odes of the Shi-King may be regarded as the root: the poems of Su-Wu and Li-ling as the first sprout from the root, and those of the Kien-An period as the increasing growth of the sprout into a stem, while the poems of the Six Dynasties are the first branches and leaves; then in the T'ang Dynasty the branches and leaves became more and more abundant, and flowers and fruit appeared crowning the noble tree of perfect poetry.' He then goes on to say: 'Students of poetry should carefully study the matter, and form, and style of the poetry of this period, as they show the source and development, the root and the full-grown flourishing tree of poetry. The root must not be lost sight of in the profusion of branches and leaves, that is, students must not read the poems of the T'ang period and neglect those of ancient times; both must be studied together in order to understand the poetry of the later periods.'

Another native critic writes: 'The poets of the T'ang Dynasty developed a style of their own in poetry different from those that preceded it.' The leading poets of the T'ang period had ability to seize all that was best in ancient poetry and embody it in a style of their own which is a natural development and not a slavish imitation.

The most prominent among the men of genius who effected this great change were Chen Tze-ang, Chang Kiu-ling, Li-Peh, Wei Ying-wuh, Liu Tsong-Yuen, Tu-Fu, Han-Yü, Tsen-T'san, Wang-Wei, Wang-Han, Li-Kiao and Chang-Shoh; and of these Li-Peh is regarded by all Chinese as a heaven-born genius—'an Immortal banished to earth,' while Tu Fu is the scholarly poet, deeply versed in all branches of Chinese literature, which gives depth, and breadth, and style, and infinite variety to his poetical compositions, which, however, though very numerous, form but a part of his contributions to the literature of his country.

The glory of the T'ang poetry dimmed somewhat towards the end of the dynasty; but during the Song Dynasty (A.D. 960-1278), which followed the brief epoch of the Five Dynasties (A.D. 907-960), Eo Yang Siu, Wang-An-shih, Hwang Ting-kien, Ch'ao Pu-chi, Luh-Yu, and other poets added fresh lustre to the glory of Chinese literature by producing many poetical compositions which could not be omitted from a large anthology containing all the best Chinese poems; but in this small book space for two or three only can be found.

It should be remembered that the great poets of the T'ang and later dynasties did not always follow the new poetical technique of the T'ang Dynasty. Many of their best poems are written in the ancient style; and I have written 'ancient style' against a few of such poems among the translations, but not against all of them.

An introduction to Chinese poetry, reviewing extensively its rise and progress, the style of each period, and the characteristics of the work of each poet, would fill a large volume—several volumes indeed would hardly suffice for an exhaustive review of such a vast field of work. But the very brief review contained in the preceding pages will enable readers to see that the three hundred odes are by no means the whole of Chinese poetry; they are, indeed, only the beginning—the source of a great river

whose countless branches, some deep and pure, others shallow and sparkling, have flowed down the ages, fertilizing and beautifying every period of Chinese life and thought, and producing a vast reservoir of poetry which has inspired many in every generation with higher sentiments of nature, country, love, friendship, and literature.

As this book of translations is chiefly intended for readers who do not understand the Chinese language, no attempt has been made to insert the Chinese characters for the names, &c., printed in the Romanized form; but, following the advice of friends who are well versed in Chinese themselves, I hope, hereafter, to publish a small volume containing the Chinese text of the translated poems only, with a few notes which may be useful to beginners. To reprint the Chinese text and notes with the English translations in one volume would add considerably to the cost of the book, while only a comparatively small number of readers—students of the Chinese language—would find the Chinese text and notes useful.

THE TECHNIQUE OF CHINESE POETRY

Form of 7-character Lüh poem beginning in the Ping tone:

A.

Ping ping tseh tseh tseh ping ping
Tseh tseh ping ping tseh tseh ping
Tseh tseh ping ping ping tseh tseh
Ping ping tseh tseh tseh ping ping
Ping ping tseh tseh ping ping tseh
Tseh tseh ping ping tseh tseh ping
Tseh tseh ping ping ping tseh tseh
Ping ping tseh tseh tseh ping ping.

Form of 7-character Lüh poem beginning in the Tseh tone:

B.

Tseh tseh ping ping tseh tseh ping
Ping ping tseh tseh tseh ping ping
Ping ping tseh tseh ping ping tseh
Tseh tseh ping ping tseh tseh ping
Tseh tseh ping ping ping tseh tseh
Ping ping tseh tseh tseh ping ping
Ping ping tseh tseh ping ping tseh
Tseh tseh ping ping tseh tseh ping.

Form of 5-character Lüh poem beginning in the Ping tone:

C.

Ping ping tseh tseh ping
Tseh tseh tseh ping ping
Tseh tseh ping ping tseh
Ping ping tseh tseh ping
Ping ping ping tseh tseh

Tseh tseh tseh ping ping
Tseh tseh ping ping tseh
Ping ping tseh tseh ping.

Form of 5-character Lüh poem beginning in the Tseh tone:

D.

Tseh tseh tseh ping ping
Ping ping tseh tseh ping
Ping ping ping tseh tseh
Tseh tseh tseh ping ping
Tseh tseh ping ping tseh
Ping ping tseh tseh ping
Ping ping ping tseh tseh
Tseh tseh tseh ping ping.

In order to understand this arrangement of characters, it should be borne in mind that Chinese characters are distinguished not only by the phonetic sounds, but also by tones resembling musical notes.

Of these only four are generally recognized in poetical compositions:

(1) The Ping-sheng, or low and even note.

(2) The Shang-sheng, or sharp and ascending note.

(3) The Khü-sheng, or clear and far-reaching note.

(4) The Ruh-sheng, or straight and abruptly finished note.

These tones help to distinguish words which have the same phonetic sound but different meanings. For instance, the word—

'li' (Ping-sheng) = black.
'li' (Shang-sheng) = village.
'li' (Khü-sheng) = sharp.
'li' (Ruh-sheng) = strength.

In written Chinese each of these words is distinguished by a different character, and the tone is, therefore, of secondary importance; but

occasionally a character has two tones—a ping and a khü, for instance, and then each tone indicates a difference of meaning, or distinguishes the use of the word as a substantive from its use as a verb.

But in poetry these tones are used to make rhythm as well as to express meaning, and when used for this purpose they are divided into ping and tseh, the ping representing the ping or low, even tone, and the tseh the other three tones, Shang, Khü, and Ruh. This brief explanation will enable the reader, I think, to perceive what is regarded by Chinese as the rhythm of a poem. In the diagrams given above, the first line consists of two ping tones, followed by three tseh tones, which are followed by two ping tones; and the arrangement of the characters in each line in terms of ping and tseh forms the rhythm of Chinese poetry. When compared, it will be seen that there are lines or couplets which are in contrast to, or harmonize with, other lines, &c.

But it is not necessary that the tones of all the characters in each couplet should agree, excepting the first and last lines which always agree exactly —tone for tone. In the other lines, the tones of the first, third, and fifth characters in a seven-character line, and the first and third in a five-character line, may be varied—ping for tseh, or tseh for ping; but the second, fourth, and sixth characters in seven-character poems, and the second and fourth in five-character poems must not be changed; when the ping tone should be used it must be used, the tseh may not be substituted for it, and when the tseh should be used it must be used, the ping may not be substituted for it. And when the opening tone of the first line is a ping, the opening tone of the line following must be tseh, and vice versa.

The following two poems are perfect specimens of the 'Tsüeh', or poem of four lines, which may be regarded as the unit of Chinese poetical composition. The first specimen shows a 'tsüeh' beginning in the Ping tone; and the second specimen a 'tsüeh' beginning in the Tseh tone:

(1)

p.	*p.*	*ts.*	*ts.*	*ts.*	*ts.*	*p.*
Ch'un	fung	tseh	ye	tao	Yü	Kwan
ts.	*ts.*	*p.*	*p.*	*ts.*	*ts.*	*p.*

Ku kwoh yen hwa siang i tsan

ts. *ts.* *p.* *p.* *p.* *ts.* *ts.*
Shao fu puh chi kwei wei teh

p. *p.* *ts.* *ts.* *ts.* *p.* *p.*
Chao chao ying shang wang fu shan.

(2)

ts. *ts.* *p.* *p.* *ts.* *ts.* *p.*
Tze meh hong ch'en fuh mien lai

p. *p.* *ts.* *ts.* *ts.* *p.* *p.*
Wu ren puh tao k'un hwa hwei

p. *p.* *ts.* *ts.* *p.* *p.* *ts.*
Hsüen tu kwan li tao ts'ien shu

ts. *ts.* *p.* *p.* *ts.* *ts.* *p.*
Tsin shi liu lang ku heo tsai

As I have stated above the 'tsüeh' of four lines, whether the line is composed of five or seven characters, may be regarded as the unit of Chinese poetical composition. In order to make a 'lüh' poem four more lines, composed exactly according to the ping-tseh arrangement of tones in the tsüeh, are added to the tsüeh; while a 'p'ai-lüh' poem is made by continuing this process beyond eight lines.

Besides the ping and tseh arrangement of tones in each line to form the metre or rhythm, the final characters of the first, second, and fourth lines of the tsüeh may rhyme with each other; but these rhymes are also controlled by the ping-tseh tones. For instance, in the specimen of a perfect tsüeh given above, the final characters of the first, second, and fourth lines are kwan, ts'an, and shan, and these sounds rhyme in Chinese;

but it will be observed that all three words belong to the ping tone, and this is the rule generally followed in the technique of modern poetry, that is, poetry made according to the new rules introduced by the poets of the T'ang Dynasty; but in ancient poetry, words both in ping and tseh tones were used for rhymes; and poets of all periods have used both systems—ancient and modern—in their poetical compositions. The tendency in recent dynasties, however, has been to follow the elaborate technique of the modern school of poetry in which great skill in the art of poetical composition is too often more highly prized than true poetry, and consequently mere cleverness is mistaken for genius.

These few remarks on the use of the ping-tseh tones in the rhythm and rhyme of Chinese poetry must not be regarded by readers as an exhaustive summary of the system, which is much more intricate than it seems, owing to many qualifying rules and conditions as to its application in relation to the other factors required to form a correct poetical composition; they will, however, suffice to give a general conception of the part played by the ping and tseh tones in the technique of Chinese poetry, especially in modern poetical compositions. But although the ping-tseh tones are indispensable to the rhythm of the modern poem, there are, as I have remarked above, other factors required to form a perfect 'tsüeh', or 'Lüh', or 'pai-lüh', and most elaborate instructions as to the use of each character or line in relation to other characters and lines in the same stanza must be mastered before a poem can be constructed that would satisfy the eye and ear, and literary standard, of the modern Chinese critic of poetry. But it must not be forgotten that the scholarly Chinese poet is just as familiar as his Western *confrère* with the metaphor, simile, allegory, epigram, climax, and all other figures of speech which are common in the prose and poetry of a literary people; and the skilful use of these in harmony with the rigid ping-tseh rules concerning rhythm and rhyme is a task of considerable difficulty for the conscientious poet. Fortunately the ancient poets did not adhere very rigidly to technique; and not a few modern poets have in many of their compositions imitated the ancient style. Besides the tsüeh and lüh there are many poetical compositions, such as the ko, hsing, yin, tz'e, k'üh, p'ien, yong, yao, t'an, ai, yuen, and pieh—many of them of very ancient origin, which are all put under the generic term 'yoh-fu', implying that they are compositions which can be set to music and sung, chanted,

recited, &c. Some of the most charming poetical compositions are found in Chinese anthologies under the above-mentioned headings; but in this brief introduction it is only possible just to call the attention of readers to them without attempting to describe the form of each separately. For the same reason I cannot attempt any description of the ancient terms fung, ya, song, &c., to which, however, translators of the Shi-King have given some attention.

It is doubtful, indeed, whether the information which I can crowd into a few introductory pages will help readers to gain an insight into Chinese poetry in the making, or utterly confuse them; but I am loath to send forth the translations without an introduction, and I must, therefore, remind readers again that this introduction gives only the barest outline of the rise and progress of Chinese poetry, and of a few of the factors which are required by modern technique in the construction of poetical compositions since the revival of literature and poetry in the T'ang Dynasty.

It should be observed that no attempt has been made to reproduce the technique outlined above in the English translations of Chinese poems in this book, as it would be impossible to restrict the translations to lines of five and seven words. In Chinese each character is a word of one syllable only, therefore a five-character line of poetry contains only five monosyllabic words, and a seven-character line seven monosyllabic words; but as many articles, pronouns, prepositions, auxiliary verbs, &c., which are understood in the Chinese, must be inserted in the English translation in order to connect the meaning of the five or seven monosyllabic words which form a line of Chinese poetry, it is obvious that, in most cases, the length of the line in the translation must be longer than that in the original Chinese. Some Chinese poems might be rendered into English in lines of five or seven syllables without doing much violence to the meaning of the original, but in most cases, the five or seven monosyllabic line in Chinese is translated into English far more correctly and accurately by a line of eight, ten, or more syllables, because the Chinese reader mentally inserts connecting parts of speech which must be written in English to make the grammar correct and the meaning of a line complete.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES OF A FEW OF THE MORE EMINENT CHINESE POETS

LI PEH.

Li Peh (Tai Peh; Tsing Lien) lived during the T'ang Dynasty, probably from A.D. 699 to 762, and he is regarded as the most brilliant of all Chinese poets.

He was connected by descent in the ninth generation with the Imperial family of the T'ang Dynasty, but was born in a remote part of the Empire now included in the Szechwan Province.

When but ten years old Li Peh was familiar with poetry and other branches of literature, and, as he grew older, his ability and genius attracted the attention and praise of the highest in the land. When introduced to the Court at Chang-an, Ho Chi-chang, one of the courtiers, exclaimed:—'He is one of the immortal genii banished to earth.' For a short time, too, he was greatly favoured by the Emperor, Hsüen-Tsung, but, having incurred the enmity of the Emperor's chief concubine, he had to withdraw from the Court and relinquish all hopes of official promotion.

He then travelled widely, writing many poems on the beauties of nature, and also in praise of wine and music, to the former of which he was too strongly addicted.

In the later part of his life, it seems, he became involved in political intrigues, for which offence he was banished to a distant region. But in his old age he was allowed to return, and he ended his days peacefully at T'ang-t'u (a place near the modern Nankin), whose governor was a kinsman named Li Yang-ping.

CHANG KIU-LING.

Chang Kiu-ling (Tze Sheo) was the son of an official in the T'ang Dynasty. At a very early age he displayed great ability, and while still

comparatively young, took a high literary degree (Tsintze), and then held high office under the Emperor Hsüen-Tsung, with whom he sometimes ventured to remonstrate for his licentious life. Once when all the courtiers presented valuable gifts to the Emperor on his birthday, Chang Kiu-ling presented him with a book written by himself and styled 'The Thousand Year Mirror', showing the causes of success and failure in former dynasties. His advice, however, was not seriously heeded at the time, but after his death his faithfulness was appreciated and he was ennobled and afterwards canonized by the Emperor.

It is recorded by one writer that Chang Kiu-ling, when a youth, trained pigeons to carry letters to his friends.

WEI YING-WUH.

Wei Ying-wuh was a native of Honan during the T'ang Dynasty, and his poetical skill ranks very high even in that famous period. During the Cheng-Yuen reign (A.D. 785-804) he was appointed Prefect of Suchow, where his beneficent rule and devotion to literature called forth the gratitude and admiration of the people.

SU SHI.

Su Shi (Tze-Chan; Tong-Po), A.D. 1036-1101, was a native of Mei-shan in Szechwan. He won the highest literary degrees, and was advanced from one official office to another until he became a Minister of State; but, owing to political feuds and intrigues, he was degraded from his high office in the capital and sent to fill inferior posts in distant parts of the Empire, where he wrote poetry and diffused a love of literature among the people he ruled.

TU FU (A.D. 712-770).

Tu Fu (Tu Tze-Mei) was the son of Tu Fan-yen, a high official in the T'ang Dynasty. In the estimation of his countrymen he ranks next to Li Peh among the great poets of the Tang Dynasty, and a few critics would give him a still higher place.

When Tu Fu's literary ability and poetical genius were made known to the Emperor, office and honours were bestowed on him.

In the poetical composition known as the Seven-character Pai-lüh, Tu Fu is the most famous of all the poets of the T'ang Dynasty, if not of all Chinese poets.

Eo Yang Siu (A.D. 1017-1072).

Eo Yang Siu (Yong-Shuh) was a famous scholar of the Song Dynasty; and he filled high official posts both in the capital and provinces, under the Emperor Ren-Tsong.

Being a man of integrity and independence he remonstrated with his Imperial master on several occasions, and sometimes suffered temporarily for his courage. His character, however, was appreciated by the Emperor, and restoration to favour followed every temporary eclipse. After his death he was canonized as Wen Chong Kong. His literary works are numerous.

Su Wu (200-100 B.C.).

Su Wu (Tze K'ing) lived in the Han Dynasty. When sent on a mission to the Khan of the Hsiung-nu he was seized by that ruler and ordered to renounce his allegiance to the Han Emperor; and on refusing to do this he was cast into prison. Afterwards he was banished for many years to the desert region around Lake Balkash, where he was compelled to tend the flocks of the Hsiung-nu; but he persisted in his loyalty to the Han Dynasty. On his return to China, when a grey-headed old man, he was greatly honoured by the Emperor, and his portrait was hung up in the Khi-lin Koh (Council Chamber).

He is held up as a pattern of loyalty by Chinese writers. His poetical compositions are ancient but not numerous.

Li Ling (First Century B.C.).

Li Ling was a military commander in the Han Dynasty. Given command of an army in the war against the Hsiung-nu he rashly advanced into the enemy's country with only a few thousand soldiers, who were surrounded

and all but three or four hundred killed, and Li Ling was captured, and spent the rest of his life in exile. His name is mentioned in the Introduction to this book of translations.

CHU KWANG-HI.

Chu Kwang-hi was a soldier of the T'ang Dynasty. He passed the highest literary examinations, and was appointed a member of the Censorate by the Emperor Hsüen Tsong.

CHEN TZE-ANG.

A celebrated scholar of the T'ang Dynasty. He filled various official offices, but is most famous for the work he did in advancing the renaissance of literature during the T'ang Dynasty. Wang Shih, a learned writer of the same period, said that Chen Tze-ang was the most famous scholar in the Empire of that time.

T'AO YUEN-MING (A.D. 365-427).

T'ao T'sien (T'ao Yuen-ming) was a scholar and poet of the Song Dynasty. He was appointed Magistrate of a district, but after filling the office only a short time he resigned it and retired into private life, spending the remainder of his years in writing poetry and in musical pursuits.

CHINESE POEMS

Only a Fragrant Spray

NAME OF POET UNKNOWN (HAN DYNASTY OR EARLIER)

Ah me, the day you left me
Was full of weary hours;
But the tree 'neath which we parted
Was rich with leaves and flowers.

And from its fragrant branches
I plucked a tiny spray,
And hid it in my bosom
In memory of that day.

I know the endless distance
Must shut you from my view,
But the flower's gentle fragrance
Brings sweetest thoughts of you.

And, though it's but a trifle,
Which none would prize for gain,
It oft renews our parting,
With all the love and pain.

The River By Night in Spring

BY CHANG POH-HSÜ

In Spring the flooded river meets the tide
Which from the ocean surges to the land;
The moon across the rolling water shines
From wave to wave to reach the distant strand.

And when the heaving sea and river meet,
The latter turns and floods the fragrant fields;
While in the moon's pale light as shimmering sleet
Alike seem sandy shores and wooded wealds.

For sky and river in one colour blend,
Without a spot of dust to mar the scene;
While in the heavens above the full-orbed moon
In white and lustrous beauty hangs serene.

And men and women, as the fleeting years,
Are born into this world and pass away;
And still the river flows, the moon shines fair,
And will their courses surely run for ay.

But who was he who first stood here and gazed
Upon the river and the heavenly light?
And when did moon and river first behold
The solitary watcher in the night?

The maples sigh upon the river's bank,
A white cloud drifts across the azure dome;
In yonder boat some traveller sails to-night
Beneath the moon which links his thoughts with home.

Above the home it seems to hover long,

And peep through chinks within her chamber blind;
The moon-borne message she cannot escape,
Alas, the husband tarries far behind!

She looks across the gulf but hears no voice,
Until her heart with longing leaps apace,
And fain would she the silvery moonbeams follow
Until they shine upon her loved one's face.

'Last night,' she murmured sadly to herself,
'I dreamt of falling flowers by shady ponds;
My Spring, ah me! half through its course has sped,
But you return not to your wedded bonds.'

For ever onward flows the mighty stream;
The Spring, half gone, is gliding to its rest;
While on the river and the silent pools
The moonbeams fall obliquely from the west.

And now the moon descending to the verge
Has disappeared beneath the sea-borne dew;
While stretch the waters of the 'Siao and Siang',[1]
And rocks and cliffs, in never-ending view.

How many wanderers by to-night's pale moon
Have met with those from whom so long apart:—
As on the shore midst flowerless trees I stand
Thoughts old and new surge through my throbbing heart!

[1] Two streams flowing into the Yangtze River.

The Beauty of Snow

BY PAO-CHAO

A thousand miles across the Dragon Mountains
The North Wind blows the whirling flakes of snow,
Until they gather on my terraced garden,
And drift before the gate in furrowed row.

Unlike the coloured plum and fragrant peach trees,
Whose buds stretch forth to greet the warm Spring days,
At dawn the snow lies in unsullied whiteness,
But flees to shelter from the sun's bright rays.

The peach flower and the plum flower have a beauty,
Which flourish in the warmth of sun and shower;
The snow's brief charm is purity and brightness,
It does not claim the sun tints of the flower.

A Maiden's Reverie

T'SIN DYNASTY, A.D. 265-419

The plum-tree's flower awakens
Thoughts of my lover now,
And I would pluck some blossoms
And send to far Si-chow.

But such a distant region
The flowers might never reach,
While if I go in person,
How great the joy to each!

I'll brush my glossy tresses,
More dark than raven's plume;
I'll wear my plum silk mantle,
And banish tears and gloom.

But where, alack, is Si-chow?
Far in the North, I know;
Oh, when I've crossed the river
I'll ask which way to go!

Ah me, the sun is setting,
Si-chow is far away;
The birds are homeward turning,
I cannot start to-day.

I'll keep an evening vigil
Beneath the cedar-tree
That stands outside the porch-way;
My love may come to me!

The jewels my hair adorning

Are glistening with the dew;
But still my lover tarries;—
What keeps him from my view?

A gentle breeze is blowing,
The night is bright as day;
I'll go and gather lilies,
And meet him on the way.

In the early Autumn season
The lotus lilies red
Are in the south pool growing,
And reach above my head.

My thoughts on old times musing,
I stoop to pluck some seeds,
In their shimmering greenness
As water 'mongst the reeds.

I put some in my bosom,
For the core is red as blood,
As the heart of a true lover,
When love is at the flood.

Pressed to my bosom closely—
No safer place, I wot,
For tokens of betrothal;
And yet my love comes not!

Above my head in batches
The wild geese northward hie,
And they will pass o'er Si-chow!
Oh, would that I could fly!

I'll mount the northern turret;
Perhaps from that lofty height
I'll see my lover coming,
The herald of the light.

Although the tower is lofty,
I cannot see afar
To where my love is dwelling,
Beneath the Northern Star.

From morn until the evening—
How long the hours do seem!—
I've paced around the turret,
As in a weary dream.

Once more I'll raise the curtain,
And show my lamp's pale light;
My love may miss the pathway,
And wander in the night.

How lofty are the heavens!
How vast the heaving sea!
Ah, life is sad and dreary
When love comes not to me!

But though my heart is weary,
I trust my lover's vow;
The south wind knows my longings
And will bear them to Si-chow.

And though the seas divide us
Our hearts are one for ay,
And in sweet dreams will mingle
Until the meeting day.

A Song of the Marches

BY LI TAI-PEH

T'ang Dynasty

The Tien-shan peaks still glisten
In robes of spotless white;
To songs of Spring I listen,
But see no flowers around.

The ground is bare and dreary,
No voice of Spring I hear,
Save the 'Willow Song',[2] so eerie,
I play upon my flute.

At morn the fight will follow
The sound of bugle call;
Each man, in sleep, the hollow[3]
Across his saddle clasps.

And by his side unrusted,
His sword is closely laid,
With which he long has trusted
The tyrant foe[4] to slay.

On noble chargers riding,
And fleeter than the wind,
All fears and risks deriding,
They cross the river Wei.

Their bows are tautened tightly,
Their quivers full of shafts,
They face the danger lightly,
And charge the haughty foe.

As rocks by lightning riven
Their ranks are rent apart;
As clouds by tempest driven
They break and flee away.

Then on the sand, blood-streaming,
The weary victors sleep,
Their swords with hoar-frost gleaming,
Their bows dark shadows cast.

The Pass has been defended,
The foes are scattered far,
The soldiers' wives untended
May seek their homes again.

[2] The name of a tune.

[3] The Chinese saddle is curved upwards both in front and at the back, leaving a deep hollow in the centre where the rider sits.

[4] Tartar tribes beyond the frontiers.

The Cowherd and the Spinning-Maid[5]

BY LUH-KI

Brightly shines the Starry River
Flowing down the Heavenly glade;
From the north-west comes the 'Herd-Boy',
From the south-east looks the 'Maid'.

Quickly waves a white hand shapely,
Sadly smiles her beauteous face,
When she sees her faithful lover
Far across the glittering space.

Arms stretched out towards each other—
With impulsive feet they stand;
Eyes with sorrow's tears bedewèd—
On the Star-Stream's shining strand.

But, alas, that bridgeless River
Is the cause of all their pain,
Dooming 'Spinning-Maid' and 'Herd-Boy'
Nevermore to meet again.

[5] According to a Chinese legend the stars K'ien-Niu (Cowherd) and Chih-Nü (Spinning-Maid) are two lovers, doomed by the gods to live on opposite sides of the 'River of Stars' (Milky Way). As there is no bridge over this river, the two lovers can only stand afar and gaze at each other. (See note to 'The Swallow's Song'.)

The Old Soldier's Return

An Ancient Poem: Poet unknown

I was but fifteen when I left my friends
For distant climes to fight our Country's foe,
And now I'm eighty—back for the first time
To see the home I left so long ago.

Where is the house? I should be near it now,
Yet possibly I may have gone astray;
Long years abroad have blurred the youthful brain,
I'll ask this countryman to point the way.

'The house is yonder—midst those grassy mounds,
Beneath the shade of fir and cypress trees,
And there lie buried all the kith and kin
Of former tillers of these fallow leas.'

The veteran sighed and wandered to the house,
And found it overgrown and desolate;
A startled hare fled through the kennel's hole,
And pheasants flew from ceiling beams ornate.

Exhausted by the journey and his grief,
The old man plucked some grain from patches wild,
And mallows from around the courtyard well,
As in the days when but a little child.

But when the homely fare was cooked and spread,
And not a friend to cheer the lonely place,
He rose, and going out to eastward gazed,
While tears flowed down his worn and furrowed face.

On the Lake near the Western Mountains

BY CH'ANG KIEN.

T'ANG DYNASTY (ANCIENT STYLE)

Here at the foot-hills of the Western Mountains
My boat rides idly on the current's trail,
And in the lengthening radiance of the sunset
It seems to chase its own reflected sail.

While in the rarer light that heralds evening
The forms of all things clearer seem to grow;
The forests and the glades and mountain ranges
Catch added beauty from the afterglow.

The graceful minarets in cloudland floating
From jadestone green take on a sombre hue,
But still flush rose tints in the darkness falling,
Although the sun has disappeared from view.

The shadows of the islands and the islets
Stretch far across the surface of the lake;
The evening mists that float above the waters
Are bright as rain-clouds after showers break.

In the distance Tsu's[6] abounding forests
Reveal their sombre outlines in the gloom;
While on the farther shore the gates of King-chow
Within the growing darkness faintly loom.

The atmosphere with nightfall groweth clearer,
A north wind blows with shrill voice through the land;
While on the sandy stretches by the waters
The swan and stork in dreamy silence stand.

The waters now have ceased from restless heaving,
My little boat is screened by rushes green;
The moon emerging from the lake's horizon
A soft light sheds upon the silent scene.

Amid the silence and the ghostly beauty
I touch my lute to plaintive songs of old,
And soon the pleasant strains and long-drawn cadence
Have seized my senses in their subtle hold.

Thus in such ecstasy the hours pass quickly,
And midnight comes with undetected speed;
But now the heavy dew upon me falling
Recalls my senses to the body's need.

Ah me! my body's but a fragile vessel
Upon the ever-moving sea of life,
Where light and shade and fitful joys and sorrows
Control me in their everchanging strife.

[6] The name of a large feudal State in the Cheu Dynasty; it included Hupeh and Hunan and parts of Honan and Kiangsu. King-chow on the Yangtze was the capital.

The Happy Farmer

BY CHU KWANG-HI

T'ANG DYNASTY

I've a hundred mulberry trees
And thirty 'mow' of grain,
With sufficient food and clothes,
And friends my wine to drain.

The fragrant grain of 'Ku-mi' seed
Provides our Summer fare;
Our Autumn brew of aster wine
Is rich beyond compare.

My goodwife comes with smiling face
To welcome all our guests;
My children run with willing feet
To carry my behests.

When work is done and evening come,
We saunter to the park,
And there, 'neath elm and willow trees
We're blithe as soaring lark.

With wine and song the hours fly by
Till each in cloudland roams,
And then, content with all the world,
We wander to our homes.

Through lattice-window steals a breeze,
As on my couch I lie,
While overhead the 'Silver Stream'
Flows through a splendid sky.

And as I gaze it comes to mind—
A dozen jars at least
Of the aster-scented wine remain
To grace to-morrow's feast.

An Old House Unroofed by an Autumn Gale

BY TU FU

T'ANG DYNASTY

The roof of my house has been blown away
By the fiercest of Autumn winds to-day;
It was merely of grass and branches built—
Yet my only shelter save a wadded quilt.

Across the river it scurried and whirled,
In tangled tufts, by the hurricane hurled,
Ascending in gusts till caught by the trees,
Or falling in ponds and on furrowed leas.

In great delight the village urchins shout,
And say I'm old and cannot run about;
And now before my face the rogues begin
To steal things, and then run away and grin.

At last I drive them off and hobble back
To find my home is shelterless, alack!
My lips are parched, my tongue is stiff and dry;
My strength is gone, I can but rest and sigh.

The wind has slackened but dark clouds affright,
And wintry is the fast approaching night;
My bed is worn and hard, my clothing spare,
I cannot sleep for pain and anxious care.

The rain still drizzles through the rafters high,
'Tween which I see the drifting stormy sky,
And everything is damp and comfortless:
What can be done to lighten such distress?

Oh, would there were a mansion of delight,
A hundred million rooms both fair and bright,
To shelter all the poor beneath the skies,
And give the joy which lasting peace supplies.

Could I but see this mansion rise sublime
Before my eyes at this, or any time;
My house and life to lose I'd be content,
Could such great blessing to the world be sent.

The Lament of the Ladies of the Siang River[7]

BY YUEN I-SHAN

The rose and orchid deck the fragrant isles,
And white clouds fly towards the Northern strand;
But though a thousand autumns pass away,
Our 'Lord' will not return to mortal's land.

The clouds are drifting to and fro in vain,
Across the river blows the autumn breeze,
And o'er the water floats a fine, white mist,
While moonlight falls on stream and wooded leas.

Upon the lofty 'Kiu-e'[8] mountain range
Throughout the night the gibbons wail and call,
And from the voiceless boughs of tall bamboos
The tears so long retained in dewdrops fall.

[7] According to a Chinese legend the Ladies of the Siang River are Nü-Ying and Ngo-Hwang, the two wives of the Emperor Shun, and this poem describes their lament for his death.

[8] According to another legend the Emperor Shun was buried in the Kiu-i Mountains.

The Waters of the Mei-Pei

BY TU FU

T'ANG DYNASTY

Two friends whose love of wonders led them oft
To leave the haunts and scenes of every day,
Invited me to join them in a voyage
Across the waters of the dread Mei-Pei![9]

Where nature in her changeful moods is seen,
In grandeur and in terror side by side;
Where mighty forces alter heaven and earth,
And puny human strength and life deride.

Will countless billows of the wide expanse
In ceaseless motion mount and roll afar?
Through fluid piles of seeming crystal rocks
Will our boat sail beyond the sheltering bar?

Delightful is the venture that we take,
And yet dire fears will gather in our throat,
The gavial huge may come in search of prey,
The monster whales may overturn our boat!

Fierce winds may rise and billows roll and break!
But our brave friends unloose the flowing sail,
And through the scattering flocks of duck and tern
The boat glides on—the white foam in our trail.

The pure and bracing air inflates our lungs—
Afar from towns where dust with cleanness vies;
The boatmen chant gay ditties as they work,
While sounds of lutes rise to the azure skies.

As fresh as dew on early morning flowers
The leaves of water-lilies float around,
Upon the surface of the water clear,
Through which we peer in vain to find the ground.

Then yielding to the current, broad and strong,
Toward the central flood we quickly forge;
The waters pure as those of Puh and Hsiai,[10]
Yet darkly deep as in the Chong-Nan gorge.[11]

The mountain heights whose base abuts the lake
Are mirrored clearly in the southern end;
The Great Peace Temple, which in cloudland hangs,
Reflects its image in the eastern bend.

The moon has risen, and its silver beams
Across the Lan-Tien Pass[12] in beauty glow,
While we sit idly on the vessel's side
And watch the nodding peaks in depths below.

And as we view the mirage of the heights
Which tower in mighty strength above our heads,
The swift Li-Long[13] in prodigal display
A shower of pearls upon the water spreads.

The Ruler of the Rivers[14] beats his drum,
And dragons haste the summons to obey;
The Consorts[15] of the ancient king descend,
Led by the Maiden of the Star-lit Way.[16]

To branchèd instruments of beaten gold,
Adorned with pendants of sapphire and jade,
They sing, and dance, midst lights of many hues,
Which flash in splendour, then in darkness fade.

In ecstasy we watch the wondrous scene,
But awe and joy are mingled in our mind,

For now far off we hear the thunder peal,
And lowering clouds with lurid lights are lined.

The waters heave with burdensome unrest,
The air is full of shadows of the dead;
The Spirits of the Universe are near,
And we cannot divine their portents dread.

And such is life—an hour of changing scenes
Of fitful joy and quickly following grief;
An hour of buoyant youth in rapid flight,
And then old age to end life—sad and brief!

[9] A vast body of water in some wild and remote part of the Empire, probably in the north-west; but the exact locality is disputed.

[10] The names of two rivers, or the two words combined may mean the clear water of a deep cove or inlet.

[11] A deep gorge in the Chong-nan Mountains in Shen-si.

[12] A famous Pass near Si-ngan, the provincial capital of Shen-si.

[13] A fabulous Dragon whose mythological ancestry and habitat I am unable to trace.

[14] Ping-i, name of the Chinese God of Waters.

[15] Nü-Ying and Ngo-Hwang, daughters of the Emperor Yao, and wives of the Emperor Shun (2288 B.C.?).

[16] The Spinning-Maid. See legend of Cowherd and Spinning-Maid.

The Swallow's Song[17]

BY EMPEROR WEN

OF THE WEI DYNASTY (A.D. 220-264)

The autumn winds are blowing,
The air is cool and drear,
The forest leaves are falling,
The grass is scant and sear.

The dew to hoar-frost changes,
And swallows southward fly;
While from the North in batches
The wild swan cloud the sky.

And I such signs discerning
Think of you, husband dear,
And long for your home-coming
From marches long and drear.

Why do you longer tarry
In such a distant place?
Think of my lonely vigils,
Sad thoughts and tear-stained face!

The harp I often finger,
And try to sing a song;
But soon I sigh and falter,
And for your coming long.

The Moon's pure light is shining
Upon my lonely bed;
The 'Star-Stream's'[18] westward flowing,
The night is not far sped.

The Cowherd and the Spinning-Girl[19]

Lament the doom that bars
The meeting of true lovers,
Across the Stream of Stars.

What folly did they ponder
To meet so dire a fate?
I wonder if we also
Are doomed to trial as great!

[17] In this poem the thoughts of a woman, whose husband is engaged in the wars beyond the frontier, are described by the poet.

[18] The Milky Way.

[19] K'ien-Niu (Cowherd) and Chih-Nü (Spinning-Girl) are the names of two stars and, according to a Chinese legend, these two stars are lovers doomed to gaze at each other across the wide 'River of Stars'; i.e. the Milky Way, but never meet. According to one version of the legend, however, the lovers are allowed to meet once a year, on the seventh night of the Seventh Month, when birds form a bridge over the 'River of Stars' to enable the Spinning-Girl to meet her lover.

Farewell to a Comrade

BY CHEN KIA-CHOW

T'ANG DYNASTY

Cold gusts from Arctic regions sweep the ground,
And snowflakes countless fly through the wintry sky,
Covering with spotless robe the earth around,
While snow flowers frail on twigs and branches lie.

As when a genial breeze in early Spring
Shakes open all the pear-trees' blossoms white,
And sombre-looking trees with leafless boughs
Are decked with radiance in a single night.

Through crevices and slits in bamboo blinds,
Which shield the entrance to our hempen tent,
Snow-whirls and keen winds blow and chill the blood,
In spite of furs and wadded garments blent.

Cold so intense is felt by all alike—
The General cannot stretch his horn-tipped bow,
In coats of mail the Captains stiffly move,
While soldiers growl or mutter curses low.

Far off the desert stretches as a sea,
In frozen ridges like to driven clouds,
Alas, the multitudes of warriors brave
The pathless waste of cruel sand enshrouds!

But now our happy comrade homeward turns,
We'll drink his health to sound of viol and flute,
And see him safely on his journey start;
Another cup, and then the old salute!

Falls thick the snow around the fortress walls,
The red flag frozen stirs not in the air,
As forth we ride from out the Eastern gate,—
In jostling groups, or quietly pair by pair.

Nearing the Tien-shan[20] road we draw in rein,
To bid our comrade there a last farewell,
And watch him upward climb the mountain path
To peaks that touch the clouds where genii dwell.[21]

But soon the winding path conceals from view
The fading horsemen as they upward wend;
All we now see are footprints in the snow,
As 'ih-lu fuh-sing'[22] we towards them send.

[20] The Tien Mountains; in many books of geography erroneously described as Tien-Shan Mountains.

[21] According to Chinese mythology, the top of the Tien Mountains touch heaven and are the abode of the genii.

[22] May the Star of Happiness accompany you to the end of the journey.

Beauty's Fatal Snare[23]

BY LI HAN-LIN

T'ANG DYNASTY

The ravens roost upon the towers of Su,
While revels reign within the Court of Wu;
The rustic Si-Shi with her peerless face,
Her slender form, her witching smile and grace.

Inflamed by wine, she now begins to sing
The songs of Wu to please the fatuous king;
And in the dance of Tsu she subtly blends
All rhythmic movements to her sensuous ends.

Si-Shi o'er Wu her spell has surely cast,
The King of Yüeh has snared his foe at last;
With wine, and song, and dance, the hours fly by:
The water-clock[24] has dripped till almost dry.

Behind the hills appears the flush of dawn,
Beyond the river sinks the moon forlorn;
And now the sun climbs up the towers of Su;
What of the revellers in the Halls of Wu!

[23] The Prince of Yüeh wishing to ruin his rival, the Prince of Wu, presented to him a very beautiful girl, named Si-Shi, who had been taught all feminine accomplishments. Fu-Ch'a, the Prince of Wu, fell into the snare, and besotted by dissolute pleasures, became an easy victim to the Prince of Yüeh who annexed the State of Wu to his own dominions. After his defeat Fu-Ch'a committed suicide.

[24] Time was measured by the clepsydra, and the expression indicates that the night was far spent and dawn near.

A Reverie in a Summer-house

BY MENG HAO-RAN

T'ANG DYNASTY (A.D. 618-905)

The daylight fades behind the Western Mountains,
And in the east is seen the rising moon,
Which faintly mirrored in the garden fountains
Foretells that night and dreams are coming soon.

With window open—hair unloosed and flowing,[25]
I lie in restful ease upon my bed;
The evening breeze across the lilies blowing
With fragrant coolness falls upon my head.

And in the solemn stillness—all-prevailing,
The fall of dewdrops from the tall bamboos—
Which grow in graceful rows along the railing—
Sounds through the silence soft as dove's faint coos.

On such an eve as this I would be singing,
And playing plaintive tunes upon the lute,
And thus to mind old friends and pleasures bringing;
But none are here to join with harp and flute!

So in a pleasant stillness I lie dreaming
Of bygone days and trusty friends of old,
Among whom Sin-tze's[26] happy face is beaming;
I would my thoughts could now to him be told.

[25] In ancient times the hair was worn long and knotted on the top of the head.

[26] The name of a genial companion of earlier days.

The Flower-Seller[27]

BY TSING-NIEN

TSING DYNASTY

The sun is sinking in the sky,
It scarcely reaches a flagstaff high;
And now the pretty flower-girl dares
Come out to sell her fragile wares.
Her voice rings out a message sweet,
As on she trips with lightsome feet,
To buy her musk and jessamine,
Her violets and white eglantine.
And the fresh perfumes of her flowers,
After last night's refreshing showers,
Borne on the gentle breeze soon find
An entrance through my lattice blind.
The windows of the rich and great
Are opened wide, and heads, ornate
With glossy hair and jewels bright,
Are thrust forth in the evening light
Of the setting sun, whose shadow falls
On the straight lines of brick-built walls,
By which men marked the time of day[28]
Ere clocks and watches came their way.
And many flowers of beauteous hue,
Still sparkling with the morning dew,
Are bought by ladies rich and fair,
To deck their deep black lustrous hair.

[27] A modern poem composed by a successful student at a Government Examination.

[28] Formerly the time of day was roughly ascertained by such means.

The Red-Flower Pear-Tree

BY EO YANG SIU

SONG DYNASTY

Posted to a distant mountain region,
The old Lang-Kwan,[29] grown grey in honest work,
Oft wandered through the valleys rough and dreary
In search of treasures which might therein lurk.

One day, growing in a sheltered corner,
He found a red-flowered pear-tree in full bloom,
And before it stood transfixed with wonder,
As when a dazzling brightness shines through gloom.

Wondering how so fair a plant could flourish
Away from genial clime and native earth,
Circled by a thousand mist-clad mountains,
And far from fragrant trees of kindred birth.

High its beauty-laden branches rising
Above the gaudy brambles trailing there,
Standing lonely in its perfect grandeur,
With none, alas! to view the picture rare.

Save the vernal breeze which strips its blossoms
And blows them open, year by year, again;
Or the feathered tribes of mountain ranges
In search of shelter from the mist or rain.

Showing it has braved the storms for ages,
Its roots are curved and knotted with the fight;
Yet the Lang-Kwan is the first of mankind
To look with pleasure on so fair a sight.

Drinking in the wealth of dewy fragrance,
He walked around the tree for many hours,
But held by reverential love and wonder,
He durst not raise a hand to pluck the flowers.

To himself the old man murmured gently,
I wish I could remove the tree from here
To grace the garden of the King's demesne,
And find a royal consort for its peer.

Such a task, alas! would be much harder
Than the long and toilsome journey of Chang-K`an,[30]
When he brought the beautiful pomegranate
From Western regions to the Land of Han.

[29] A District Magistrate in ancient times.

[30] Chang-K`an, or Chang-K`ien, a Minister of the Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty. In this poem it is said that he brought the pomegranate to China, but other writers say the grape-vine.

A Song of Princess Tze-Yuh[31]

BY HAN-CHONG

(ANCIENT)

As Southern birds avoid a Northern snare,
    My kin avoid alliances with thine;
And though my love for thee would greatly dare,
    I know our clans the marriage would decline.

I would have followed thee, but evil talk
    Besmirched our names and sent us far apart;
But why the world its love of slander balk?
    'Tis evil fate that has despoiled my heart!

I wept for thee and mourned for three long years,
    As mourns the phoenix when her consort's dead;
And then death came and ended grief and tears;
    For after thee no other could I wed.

And now you stand before my grave and grieve,
    My wraith's permitted for a moment's space,
The confines of the Spirit land to leave
    And visit earth to see thee face to face.

And, oh believe, though quick we part once more,
    And in the body cannot meet and love,
Our souls are one till life and time are o'er,
    And we united in the realms above.

[31] Tze-Yuh, daughter of Fu-Chai, Prince of the Wu State, and Han-Chong loved each other and wished to marry, but political feuds prevented their union. Thereupon Han-Chong travelled abroad, and Tze-Yuh, after three years of fruitless mourning, died of grief. When Han-Chong returned and

visited Tze-Yuh's grave to mourn there, he had a vision of her beautiful face, which inspired him to compose this song.

Distaste for Official Life

BY TAO TSIEN

T'SIN DYNASTY

For thirty years I read, and mused, and wrote,
Or idly angled from my fishing-boat;
Or wandered through the woods, or climbed the hills,
Listening to songsters and to murmuring rills;

Or sauntering in my garden talked with flowers,
As friend with friend, for many happy hours;
Or working in my fields ablaze with golden grain,
And herbs and fruits which keep life clean and sane.

Far from the busy mart and huckstering crowd,
Striving for gold or place with brawlings loud,—
From youth to middle age I've passed my days
Midst flowers and fields hearing what Nature says.

And now, alas! I'm on this boat and bound
For far King-chow, with rank and office crowned;
To village home and friends I've bid farewell,
And of life's peace, I fear, I've tolled the knell.

From off the shore a pleasant breeze now blows,
And on and on the placid river flows;
While the pale shining of the Queen of Night
Floods the great universe with silvery light.

I cannot sleep, the future weights my mind,
The calls of office—cares of every kind
Oppress me with a sense of coming woes—
A forlorn hope against unnumbered foes!

I fain would tune my harp and ballads sing,
Some comfort to my sinking heart to bring;
But such poor solace even is denied—
My hands are nerveless and my tongue is tied.

How can I leave my former happy life
To mingle in ambition's worldly strife!
What care I for the spoils of rank and power,
The petty triumphs of the passing hour!

My office I'll resign and homeward turn
To till my farm beside the rippling burn,
Where I in happy freedom may once more
The Muses and the Book of Nature pore.

There in my rustic lodge in leisure time,
I'll cherish every thought and scene sublime,
And following still the teachers of my youth
A name I'll build upon eternal truth.

The Fragrant Tree

BY WEI YING-WUH

T'ANG DYNASTY

In a far-off fragrant garden
Grows a tree of beauty rare,
Whose reflection on the brooklet
Makes a vision fair.

But when now I see this vision,
Heart and mind are wrung with grief,
Mourning hours of blissful meeting—
Every hour too brief.

Rich as ever is the foliage,
Opal clouds the shimmering boughs,
And the dewy leaves still glisten
While the sun allows.

But, alas, Her presence lacking,
What are all such things to me!
She will never more be plucking
Blossoms from this tree.

Here beside the brook are traces
Of her light and gladsome feet;
But again we two shall never
In this garden meet.

A Song of the Snow

BY LUH FANG-WENG

Three days it snowed on Chang-an[32] plain,
With drifts the Pass[33] was stacked;
The iron cows[34] could not be moved,
The dew-pans[35] froze and cracked.

A traveller of handsome mien,
And clad in white foxskin,
With curled moustache and strong of limb,
Came to the Pao-chan[36] inn.

At night he supped and drank full well
Until he soundly slept;
But in the early dawn he woke
And on his strong horse leapt.

Then riding through the drifts of snow
He reached the South Range bare,
And hunted for a tiger fierce
Which long had 'scaped the snare.

And when the crafty beast was met,
An arrow from his bow
Transfixed its bounding body huge,
And reddened deep the snow.

With dying strength it beat the air,
And uttered piercing yells,
Which shook the hills and forest trees,
And echoed through the dells.

The carcase then he draggèd back

Along a crowded course;
The bones a pillow frame supplied,
The skin adorned his horse.

But when confusion fills the land,
And peace is under ban,
Why don't such men of might come forth
To help the King of Han!

[32] Now Si-ngan, the provincial capital of Shen-si, but in the Han Dynasty the capital of China.

[33] A very important mountain pass near Si-ngan.

[34] Vessels used in the conservancy of the Yellow River.

[35] Pans to hold dew, which was collected to provide the Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty with bathing-and drinking-water and thus promote longevity.

[36] 'The Precious Hairpin,' merely the sign of the inn.

The Old Temple among the Mountains

BY CHANG WEN-CHANG

T'ANG DYNASTY (618-905 B.C.)

The temple courts with grasses rank abound,
And birds throng in the forest trees around;
But pilgrims few, though tablets still remain,
Come to the shrine while revolutions reign.

The mice climb through the curtains—full of holes,
And thick dust overspreads the broidered stoles;
The temple pool in gloomy blackness lies
To which the sleeping dragon[37] sometimes hies.

[37] The meaning of this expression is not clear; it has a political signification.

A Soldier's Farewell to his Wife

BY SU-WU[38]

HAN DYNASTY, OR EARLIER

My dear wife, you and I have been as one,
No doubt has marred the faith, which love has won,
Our chief desire throughout the married state
Has been of love and joy to give and take.

But now, alas! the joy of Spring departs,
And sorrow's shafts must enter both our hearts;
I cannot sleep; I must arise and see
The time; ah me, how quick the hours do flee!

Awake, my dearest, for the stars have set,
The grief of parting must be bravely met;
And yet the dreary marches weight my mind,—
As through defiles and desert plains they wind.

And then, at last, the awful battle-field,
Where I must fight and naught to foemen yield;
But, oh! the bitter, paralysing pain—
To think that we may never meet again!

I must let fall the long restrainèd tears
As, clasping hands, you calm my anxious fears;
If not, my heart will break with sighs repressed
To hear your love so tenderly confessed.

But courage, we will think of Young Love's day,
And all the pleasures which therein did stay;
And this shall cheer me on the toilsome road,
And help you here to bear your weary load.

Then with what joy we shall renew our life,
When I return safe from the dreadful strife;
But if, alas! the Fates should death decree,
My spirit shall for ever live with thee.

[38] Chinese commentators regard this poem as Su's farewell to his own wife, written when he was sent on an expedition to the land of the Hsiung-nu, where he was captured and kept in captivity for many years.

The Wanderer's Return

BY TU FU

T'ANG DYNASTY

The setting sun beneath the red-lined clouds,
Which mass around the foot-hills in the west,
Still floods the valley with a rose-hued light,
And lures the chirping birds to seek their rest.

The wayworn traveller pauses near the gate,
From which he sallied forth so long ago;
Unconscious then of what Fate held in store—
The years of separation, loss, and woe.

The neighbours press around the garden fence,
And gaze with mouth agape, or quietly sigh;
While wife and children awestruck, rigid stand,
And then tears flow and to his arms they fly.

'For years on revolution's waves I've tossed,
While wife and bairns mourned me in hopeless plight;
And now to-night, as in a dream, I sit
With all my loved ones 'neath the lamp's bright light.'

The Pleasures of a Simple Life with Nature

BY LI-SHANG-YIN

T'ANG DYNASTY

On these pleasant hills residing,
Far from worldly din and strife,
Leisurely with nature living,
Here I pass a happy life.

Gently wave the bamboo copses,
Fanned by evening breezes light;
While the flowers and moon-beams mingle
In the ghostly hours of night.

Through ravines the waters gurgle,
Stemmed by scattered rock and stone;
Round the bends the footpath wanders—
By the mosses overgrown.

Here with friends and habits simple,
And a cup of generous wine,
Fingering lute and old songs singing—
For no other heaven I pine.

Listening to the Playing on a Lute in a Boat

BY SU-SHIH

In my boat I sat alone,
And the hours were fast in flight,
When the sound of music broke
The stillness of the night.

Sighing winds through fir-trees swept,
Falling cascades murmured low,
As the master touched his lute—
So lovingly and slow.

Clutching fast my lapelled coat,
Rapture swayed me without bounds,
As with every nerve intent,
I listened to the sounds.

Yet again I longed to hear
Ancient chimes on jadestone bell,
Drawn forth by the Master's hand
From lute he loved so well.

Since the days of Chen and Wei,[39]
When confusion filled the land,
Music rare of ancient style
Has found but scant demand.

Times and instruments alike,
For a thousand years and more,
Silent and forgotten lay,
And few the loss deplore!

One alone—the priceless lute—

Change and storm and wreck survives,
Watching nations rise and wane,
As god of mortal lives.

Music old is now decried,
Light songs and ditties sought,
Strains insipid, jerky turns,
Light and crispy wrought.

Instruments of wood remain,
Void of human feelings sweet,
Which the soul of ancient song
Never more may greet.

Peaceful is the river now,
Moon-beams play upon the scene,
From the ceaseless din of life
Night provides a pleasant screen.

In the silence of this hour,
Will you, Master, yet once more,
Wen-wang's[40] melodies revive,
As in the days of yore?

[39] The Wei and Ch'en Dynasties.

[40] Duke Chang, the virtual founder of the Chow Dynasty; Wen Wang being his posthumous title. His son, Prince Wu, was the first ruler of the Chow Dynasty.

Reflections on the Past[41]

THIS IS ONLY ONE SECTION OF A LONG POEM BY TAO TSIEN.

The sun went down and cloudless came the night,
A gentle zephyr breathed through moonlit skies;
And bevies of fair women thronged the Court,
The beauty of the starlight in their eyes.

With wine and singing swiftly flew the hours
Until the herald of the dawn appeared;
But when the music and the rapture ceased,
Deep sighs were heard and weird forebodings feared.

Such beauty even in the Halls of T'sin
As on this fateful night was seldom seen,—
A lustrous moon in fleecy clouds it shines!
A splendid flower amidst the foliage green!

How fair the groups of revellers—fair the scene!
But pleasures such as these must pass away!
How keen the raptures of those fleeting hours!
What of the burdens of the coming day?

[41] This poem probably refers to the revelries of the Court at the end of the T'sin Dynasty 300-200 B.C., before it was overthrown by the founder of the Han Dynasty.

A Lowly Flower

BY BAY SIE T'IAO

T'ANG DYNASTY

A flowering grass I rise
From the side of a far-spread lake,
Whose waters lave and fertilize,
And all my thirsty tissues slake.

The dews of Spring with gentle power
Evolve my glossy emerald leaves;
The colours of my fragrant flower
The rime of early Autumn weaves.

And yet in trembling fear I grow,
Lest root and stem should be uptorn
By sudden storm or rushing flow,
And leave me helpless and forlorn.

So here contented will I lie,
Although a plant of humble birth;
Nor try to soar to realms on high
Above the confines of the earth.

For never yet has living soul
By strength or wisdom changed his fate;
All things are under heaven's control,
Who allocates to each his state.

On returning to a Country Life

BY TAO TSIEN

My youth was spent amidst the simple charms
Of country scenes—secure from worldly din,
And then, alas! I fell into the net
Of public life, and struggled long therein.

The captive bird laments its forest home;
The fish in tanks think of the sea's broad strands;
And I oft longed, amidst official cares,
To till a settler's plot in sunny lands.

And now I have my plot of fifteen 'mow',[42]
With house thereon of rustic build and thatch;
The elm and willow cast a grateful shade,
While plum-and peach-trees fill the entrance patch.

Away from busy towns and dusty marts,
The dog barks in the silent country lane;
While chickens cluck among the mulberry-trees,
And life is healthy and the mind is sane.

Here in my house—with room for friend or two,
On my own farm—won from the barren plain,
Escaped from cares of office and routine,
I live a free and natural life again.

[42] A Chinese acre, a measure of land equal to about one-fifth of an English acre.

The Brevity of Life

POET UNKNOWN: HAN DYNASTY, OR EARLIER

Our years on earth are brief,
But few a hundred win;
A thousand years of grief
Are packed therein.

The day quick takes its flight,
The dark is sad and long;
Then let us cheer the night
With feast and song.

The niggard thinks it wise
To save and live by rule;
But sages may arise
To call him fool!

Conscripts leaving for the Frontier[43]

BY TU-FU

T'ANG DYNASTY

Chariots rumbling; horses neighing;
Soldiers shouting martial cries;
Drums are sounding; trumpets braying;
Seas of glittering spears arise.

On each warrior's back are hanging
Deadly arrows, mighty bows;
Pipes are blowing, gongs are clanging,
On they march in serried rows.

Age-bowed parents, sons and daughters
Crowd beside in motley bands;
Here one stumbles, there one falters
Through the clouds of blinding sands.

Wives and mothers sometimes clinging
To their loved ones in the ranks,
Or in grief their bodies flinging
On the dusty crowded flanks.

Mothers', wives', and children's weeping
Rises sad above the din,—
Through the clouds to Heaven creeping—
Justice begging for their kin.

'To what region are they going?'
Asks a stranger passing by;
'To the Yellow River, flowing
Through the desert bare and dry!

'Forced conscription daily snapping
Ties which bind us to our clan;
Forced conscription slowly sapping
All the manhood of the Han.'

And the old man went on speaking
To the stranger from afar:

"Tis the Emperor, glory seeking,
Drives them 'neath his baleful star.

'Guarding river; guarding passes
On the frontier, wild and drear;
Fighting foes in savage masses—
Scant of mercy, void of fear.

'Proclamations, without pity,
Rain upon us day by day,
Till from village, town, and city
All our men are called away.

'Called away to swell the flowing
Of the streams of human blood,
Where the bitter north wind blowing
Petrifies the ghastly flood.

'Guarding passes through the mountains,
Guarding rivers in the plain;
While in sleep, in youth's clear fountain,
Scenes of home come back again.

'But, alas! the dream is leaded
With the morn's recurring grief,
Only few return—grey-headed—
To their homes, for days too brief.

'For the Emperor, still unheeding
Starving homes and lands untilled,
On his fatuous course proceeding,
Swears his camps shall be refilled.

'Hence new levies are demanded,
And the war goes on apace,
Emperor and foemen banded
In the slaughter of the race.

'All the region is denuded
Of its men and hardy boys,
Only women left, deluded
Of life's promise and its joys.

'Yet the prefects clamour loudly
That the taxes must be paid,—
Ride about and hector proudly!
How can gold from stones be made?

'Levy after levy driven,
Treated more like dogs than men,
Over mountains, tempest riven,
Through the salty desert fen.

'There by Hun and Tartar harried—
Ever fighting, night or day;
Wounded, left to die, or carried
Far from kith and kin away.

'Better bring forth daughters only
Than male children doomed to death,
Slaughtered in the desert lonely,
Frozen by the north wind's breath.

'Where their bodies, left unburied,
Strew the plain from west to east,
While above in legions serried
Vultures hasten to the feast.

'Brave men's bones on desert bleaching,
Far away from home and love,
Spirits of the dead beseeching
Justice from the heaven above.'

[43] This poem is an attempt to describe the miseries of the people under compulsory military service during the long wars carried on by the Emperor Hsüen-Tsung of the Han Dynasty.

Estimating the Value of a Wife

UNKNOWN: ANCIENT

Once upon a time a husband, weary
Of the selfsame face before him day by day,
Determined to dismiss his goodwife promptly,
And take a new one—to her great dismay!

Without delay the little deal was settled,—
The husband on his purpose being bent,—
The new wife through the front door entered grandly,
The old one from a side-door sadly went.

One day the old wife to her home returning
From gathering wild flowers on the mountain side,
Met with her quondam master in the valley,
And, kneeling, asked him how the new one vied.

'The new wife', said the husband very slowly,
'Has beauty that is equal to your own,
But still her hands are not so deft and useful,
Nor can she compass so much work alone.

'The new wife's hands are very skilled in weaving
Embroidered satins with her dainty touch;
The old wife's fingers, faster and unwearied,
Of useful fabrics weave five times as much.

'So when I reckon up the charms and uses
Of goodwives, number One and number Two,
There's little room within my mind for doubting,
I had the better bargain when I'd you.'

The Lady Lo-Fu

HAN DYNASTY, OR EARLIER

On a bright and sunny morning,
From her mother's house there came,
One who needed no adorning,—
Lo-Fu was the lady's name.

On her arm a basket swinging,
Made of silk her own hand weaves,
Forth she wanders blithely singing,
Bent on gathering mulberry leaves.

From her head in graceful tresses
Falls the fine and lustrous hair,
While each shapely ear caresses
Just one pearl of beauty rare.

Purple bodice, broidered quaintly,
Silken skirt with amber lace,
Gave the touch demure and saintly
To her sweetly winsome face.

Travellers dropped the loads they carried,
And in wonder stroked their chin;
Young men, whether free or married,
Doffed their hats a glance to win.

Farmers stay their hand in ploughing,
Peasants stand as in a dream,
Now and then the trees allowing
Of the girl a passing gleam.

On this morn an Envoy passing,

From a mission to the sea,
Where much wealth he'd been amassing,
Saw Lo-Fu beneath a tree.

For her silkworms food providing,
Work she did with greatest zest;
All her friends around residing
Owned her silk was of the best.

Near the tree the Envoy stopping
With his escort in array,
Soldiers boughs of mulberries lopping
Helped to make a fine display.

From his retinue emerging
Came the Envoy's trusty man,
Who his master's message urging,
Gently asked her name and clan.

'Lo-Fu,' came the answer proudly,
'Of the ancient house of T'sin!'
Adding, too, a little loudly,
'And my age is seventeen.'

'Will you join me?' asked the Envoy,
'Sharing all my wealth and power,
All the treasures of this convoy
Would not far exceed your dower!'

'You have a wife,' she answered coldly,
'And most foolish are, I fear;
I,' she added firm and boldly,
'Also have a husband dear.

'And my husband is the leader
Of a thousand horsemen brave,
Midst whom not one base seceder
Would another captain crave!

'On his charger, white and fiery,
'Mongst the troop he's first espied,
Soldier-like, erect and wiry,
With his keen sword by his side.

'When but fifteen he enlisted
Without patronage or fame,
And at twenty, unassisted,
Officer at Court became.

'Then at thirty, unexpected,
Captain in the Royal Clan;
Now at forty he's selected
Chief commandant of Ch'ang-an.

'Gallant, but of gentle bearing,
When the battle's fought and won,
For the praise of men less caring
Than the meed for duty done.

'Yes, a clear-eyed, clean-souled hero
Is the man I'm praising now,
And your value sinks to zero
When compared with his, I vow.

'True, a lowly work I'm doing,
And the silk we use I spin,
But remember you are wooing
Lo-Fu of the House of T'sin.'[44]

[44] The ancient State of T'sin, which finally embraced the whole of Shen-si and Kansuh. In 221 B.C. this State under Shi Hwang Ti subdued all China, and thereafter the ruling sovereigns are known as the T'sin Dynasty.

An Autumn Evening in the Garden

BY LI YI

The Summer's gone, but summer heat remains,
And sleepless nights still leave us all repining;
So to the garden I have moved my couch,
And on it I am peacefully reclining.

The white clouds spread themselves across the sky,
And through the rifts the moon's soft light is falling
On dewy grass and flowers and trees around,
While from the towers night birds are faintly calling.

The gentle rustling of the tall bamboos
In subtle symphony of tone is blending
With the waters of the fountain and the brook,
Which flow and murmur on their ways unending.

While through the gauzy garments which I wear
The cooling evening breeze is gently blowing,
My feeling of contentment is more deep
Than when I'm where the ruby wine is flowing.

Muh-Lan[45]

Muh-Lan's swift fingers flying to and fro
Crossed warp with woof in deft and even row,
As by the side of spinning-wheel and loom
She sat at work without the women's room.[46]
But tho' her hand the shuttle swiftly plies
The whir cannot be heard for Muh-Lan's sighs;
When neighbours asked what ills such mood had wrought,
And why she worked in all-absorbing thought;
She answered not, for in her ears did ring
The summons of last evening from the King,
Calling to arms more warriors for the west,
The name of Muh-Lan's father heading all the rest.
But he was ill—no son to take his place,
Excuses meant suspicion and disgrace;
Her father's honour must not be in doubt;
Nor friend, nor foe, his stainless name shall flout;
She would herself his duty undertake
And fight the Northern foe for honour's sake.
Her purpose fixed, the plan was soon evolved,
But none should know it, this she was resolved;
Alone, unknown, she would the danger face,
Relying on the prowess of her race.
A charger here, a saddle there, she bought,
And next a bridle and a whip she sought;
With these equipped she donned the soldier's gear,
Arming herself with bow and glittering spear.
And then before the sun began his journey steep
She kissed her parents in their troubled sleep,
Caressing them with fingers soft and light,
She quietly passed from their unconscious sight;
And mounting horse she with her comrades rode
Into the night to meet what fate forbode;

And as her secret not a comrade knew,
Her fears soon vanished as the morning dew.
That day they galloped westward fast and far,
Nor paused until they saw the evening star;
Then by the Yellow River's rushing flood
They stopped to rest and cool their fevered blood.
The turbid stream swept on with swirl and foam
Dispelling Muh-Lan's dreams of friends and home;
Muh-Lan! Muh-Lan! she heard her mother cry—
The waters roared and thundered in reply!
Muh-Lan! Muh-Lan! she heard her father sigh—
The river surged in angry billows by!
The second night they reach the River Black,
And on the range which feeds it, bivouac;
Muh-Lan! Muh-Lan! she hears her father pray—
While on the ridge the Tartars' horses neigh;
Muh-Lan! Muh-Lan! her mother's lips let fall!
The Tartars' camp sends forth a bugle call!
The morning dawns on men in armed array
Aware that death may meet them on that day;
The Winter sun sends forth a pallid light
Through frosty air on knights in armour bright;
While bows strung tight, and spears in glittering rows,
Forebode the struggle of contending foes.
And soon the trumpets blare—the fight's begun;
A deadly *mêlée*—and the Pass is won!
The war went on, and many a battle-field
Revealed Muh-Lan both bow and spear could wield;
Her skill and courage won her widespread fame,
And comrades praised, and leaders of great name.
Then after several years of march and strife,
Muh-Lan and others, who had 'scaped with life
From fields of victory drenched with patriots' blood,
Returned again to see the land they loved.
And when at last the Capital[47] was reached,
The warriors, who so many forts had breached,
Were summoned to the presence of the King,

And courtiers many did their praises sing;
Money and presents on them, too, were showered,
And some with rank and office were empowered;
While Muh-Lan, singled out from all the rest,
Was offered fief and guerdon of the best.
But gifts and honours she would gladly lose
If she might only be allowed to choose
Some courier camels, strong and fleet of pace,
To bear her swiftly to her native place.

And now, at last, the journey nears the end,
And father's, mother's voices quickly blend
In—'Muh-Lan, Muh-Lan! welcome, welcome, dear!'
And this time there was naught but joy to fear.
Her younger sisters decked the house with flowers,
And loving words fell sweet as summer showers;
Her little brother shouted Muh-Lan's praise,
For many proud and happy boastful days!
The greetings o'er, she slipped into her room—
Radiant with country flowers in fragrant bloom—
And changed her soldier's garb for woman's dress:
Her head adorned with simple maiden's tress—
A single flower enriched her lustrous hair—
And forth she came, fresh, maidenly, and fair!
Some comrades in the war had now come in,
Who durst not mingle in the happy din;
But there in awe and admiration stood,
As brave men do before true womanhood;
For not the boldest there had ever dreamed,
On toilsome march, or when swords flashed and gleamed
In marshalled battle, or on sudden raid,
That their brave comrade was a beauteous maid.

[45] Muh-Lan was a famous heroine of the Liang Dynasty (A.D. 502-556) who, when her father was summoned to serve as a soldier in the wars on the north-western frontier, and was unable to obey the order on account of sickness, put on a soldier's dress and took his place in the army for several years. She fought in many battles, winning great praise for her bravery, and

ever since she has been regarded as the ideal of daughterly devotion and feminine courage.

[46] In the porch of the women's apartment.

[47] The capital of China at that time was Chang-an, now Si-an-Fu the provincial capital of Shen-si.

The Old Fisherman

BY LUH FANG-WEN

T'ANG DYNASTY

While wandering up the river-side alone
To view the landscape of my new-found home,
Away from cities and the haunts of men
Where I midst nature's scenes can quietly roam,

I came upon a fisher's lonely hut
Ensconced within a winding of the stream,
And in a boat the fisherman himself;
While on his sail the sunlight sent a gleam.

Across the river stands a stately mountain
Which wandering artists oft have tried to paint,
But none could seize the subtle blend of colours—
Of purple blues and rose-dawn flushes faint.

Alas! the fisherman through summers many,
Has gazed upon the glory of this scene,
And yet his mind's unwakened to its beauty,
His hand unskilled to limn its tints and sheen.

And my hand, too, alas! has lost its cunning
And cannot serve my brain as in my youth,
So men will lose another glorious picture
Of Nature with her beauty and her truth.

Midnight in the Garden

BY LIU TSONG-YUEN

T'ANG DYNASTY (ANCIENT STYLE)

The midnight hours were passing
And sleep still past me flew;
My mind—so keenly working—
Could hear the dropping dew.

So from my bed arising
I open wide the door—
The western park revealing,
And hills that heavenward soar.

Across the Eastern ranges
The clear moon coldly shines
On bamboos, loosely scattered,
And trailing mountain vines.

And so intense the stillness,
That from the distant hills
I hear the pigeons cooing,
And murmuring streams and rills.

For hours I have been thinking,
As in a silent dream,
And now beyond the mountains
I see the dawn's first gleam.

Reflections on the Brevity of Life

POET'S NAME UNKNOWN: HAN DYNASTY OR EARLIER (206 B.C.-220 A.D.)

We sought the city by the Eastern gate,
Our chariot moving at a leisured rate,
Along the road on which the sunlight weaves
The trembling of the willow's rustling leaves.

And far away are pine-trees towering high,
Beneath whose shade the graves of heroes lie;
In Hades now their last long sleep they take,
From which a mortal never more shall wake.

How vast the gulf between the quick and dead!
Yet as the morning dew our life is sped;
The rocks and hills enduring strength retain,
But mortals pass in fast and endless train.

Alas! the sages are inert to trace
Beyond the grave the future of our race;
Alchemic nostrums, too, are used in vain,
They cannot turn life's ills to endless gain.

Then let us drain the goblet while we live,
And take the best the fleeting hour can give.
In life a little pleasure may be won,
To-morrow we must die and there'll be none.

So-fei gathering Flowers

BY WANG CHANG-LING

In a dress of gauzy fabric
    Of the 'Lien' leaf's emerald hue
So-fei glides amongst the lilies
    Sprinkled with the morning dew.

Rose-hued are the lotus-blossoms,
    Rose-hued, too, the maiden's cheeks;
Is it So-fei's form I follow,
    Or the flowers she seeks?

Now I hear a song arising
    From the lotus bowers,
Which distinguishes the maiden
    From her sister flowers.

A Farewell[48]

BY LI TAI-PEH

Far up the Song-Yang's sacred mountain,
Unrestrained by lock or bridge,
Plows a pure and peaceful streamlet
'Neath the 'Gem-Maid's' grassy ridge.

There at eve midst pine-trees sombre
Looms the large and lustrous moon;
And within my ancient dwelling
You I hope to welcome soon.

Yes, my friend, I'll come to see you
At the closing of the year,
In your home among the mountains,
Where you live without a fear.

Deep in searching for the Chang-pu,
With its bloom-flushed purple flower,
Which endows the happy finder
With immortal life and power.

Ere I come you may have found it,
And to realms where genii dwell
Winged your flight upon the dragon,
Bidding to our earth farewell.

[48] Poems similar to this one are frequently written by literary men in China when bidding farewell to a friend.

The Khwun-ming Lake

BY TU FU

In ancient times the flags of Wu[49]
Made gay the Khwun-ming Lake,[50]
On which his ships in mimic strife
The decks of foemen rake.

But now deserted is the scene,
And in the moon's pale light,
The Spinning-Maid[51] upon the shore
Sits silent in the night.

The Autumn breezes seem to move
The mammoth stony whales,[52]
And send a tremor through their frames
Vibrating all their scales.

The Ku-mi[53] seeds float on the waste,
As clouds of sombre hue;
The lotus-flowers are crushed beneath
The weight of frozen dew.

While from the cloud-capped Pass[54] above,
The eagle's eye aglow,
Sees but an aged fisherman
Midst lakes and streams below.

[49] The Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty ascended the throne 140 B.C.

[50] A lake probably situated to the south-west of Chang-an, the capital of China in the Han Dynasty. This city is now the provincial capital of Shen-si and better known as Si-an.

[51] A stone image of the Spinning-Maid stood on one shore of the lake, and another of the Cowherd on the opposite shore.

[52] A stone image of an immense fish covered with finely carved scales was also placed by the side of the lake.

[53] A kind of rice.

[54] Probably the celebrated 'Tung' Pass near Chang-an.

The whole poem has a political signification implying that revolution had turned the country into a wilderness, and desolation taken the place of former prosperity and greatness.

Reflections

BY CHANG KIU-LING

The foliage of the lilies in the Spring
In glowing freshness shows its vernal birth;
While in the Autumn cassia-blossoms bright
Renew the beauty of the fading earth.

In seasons such as these our hearts rejoice,
And deeper thoughts arise within the mind,
As Nature woos us in a tender mood,
And teaches lessons that are true and kind.

Who would not be as grass and flowers and trees,
That denizen the forest and the hill,
And listening to the music of the winds,
With sympathy and mutual gladness thrill!

For flowers have natures teaching them to live
In sweet content in glen, or glade, or field;
By plucking them fair women cannot add
Aught to the happiness their own lives yield.

These four stanzas are but a section of a long poem. In this allegory the poet reveals his own distaste for official life and his love of Nature. Beautiful women cannot add to the happiness of the flowers by plucking them, &c., implies that the Emperor cannot increase the happiness of the poet by appointing him to high official posts, and inviting him to the Court.

Pride and Humility[55]

BY CHANG-KIU-LING

T'ANG DYNASTY (A.D. 618-905)

I'm but a sea-bird, wandering here alone,
And dare not call the ponds and lakes my own;
But what are those two lovely birds on high,
Shining resplendent 'gainst the morning sky?

Upon the top bough of the San-Chu[56] tree,
Presumptuously they build that all may see;
Their feathers than the iris lovelier far,
What if a missile should their beauty mar!

Such brilliant robes, which they with joy expose,
Might well excite the envy of their foes;
And even the gods may view with dire disdain
The high ambition of the proud and vain.

Now I in quiet obscurity can roam
Far from my nest, flecked by the ocean's foam;
Yet, in a world where greed is always rife,
No one would raise a hand to take my life.

[55] This translation is only a portion of a long poem.

[56] A mythical tree of the genii; but in the poem it may mean a very conspicuous tree.

Dwellers in the Peach Stream Valley[57]

BY CHANG-HSÜEN

T'SING DYNASTY

While the master was wrapped in slumber the fishing-boat slipped its stake,
And drifted, and swirled, and drifted far over the broadening lake,
Till islets, and mainland, and forests came into view once more,
While the fisherman gazed and pondered the lay of the new-found shore.
But erelong he espied an opening, shown by the broken wave,
And in venturous mood he steered his boat into a narrow cave,
Where an azure mist obscured the scenes through channels long and low,
As the current bore him gently into a world of long ago.
In this old, flower-bestrewèd land, at first no path the eye could tell,
For on the streams and on the banks the red rain of peach flowers fell;
Yet from the purple-shadowed mountains which screened this favoured land
Flowed forth the Peach-Fount river along its bed of silver sand;
But, winding with the stream, the thickset peach-tree groves with red-veined flowers
Hid the cooling waters flowing in and out the shady bowers.
And here and there along the banks, set in nooks of calm repose,
Were cottage homes of rustic work from which the wreathed blue smoke arose;
Showing that in this happy valley beyond the world's dull roar,
Life went on as sweet and simple as in the golden days of yore,
And the people of this valley in their ancient garments clad
Were courteous in their manners and rejoiced in all they had;
While the dogs and fowls beside them harmonized with all at hand,
And the mulberry-tree and flax-plant hid the former barren land.
When the dwellers in this favoured region saw the stranger guest,
They set before him food and wine and kindly bade him rest;

And when true courtesy allowed they asked of the things and men
In the world of sin and sorrow far beyond their quiet life's ken.
And when the time to leave them came, and the stranger could not stay,
They led him through the cavern's channels and saw him sail away.
In after life the fisherman often tried again, but failed
To find the opening to the Valley through which he once had sailed;
But when the sand of life through the glass its course had nearly run,
He thought he saw the way lay to it beyond the westering sun.

[57] There are many versions of this legend both in poetry and prose. The introductory and closing lines of the translation are partly based on other versions of the story than that in the poem translated.

This poem and 'The Fishermen's Song', and 'The Students' Ramble', are taken from 'A Selection of Poems' written by successful graduates at the Government Examinations during the present dynasty.

Many of these prize poems are cleverly and beautifully written, and they reveal considerable poetic talent, but not the power and genius found in the work of ancient Chinese poets.

The Five Sons

BY TAO TSIEN

T'SIN DYNASTY (A.D. 265-419)

I am wrinkled and gray,
And old before my day;
For on five sons I look,
And not one loves a book.

Ah-Shu is sixteen years,
The sight of work he fears;
He is the laziest lout
You'd find the world throughout.

Ah-süen has tried in vain
A little wit to gain;
He shirks the student's stool,
At grammar he's a fool!

Yong-twan is thirteen now,
And yet I do avow
He can't discriminate
The figures six and eight![58]

Tong-tze is only nine,
But clearly does opine
That life, with all its cares,
Consists of nuts and pears.

Alas, that Fate so dour
On me her vials should pour!
What can I do but dine,
And drown my woes in wine!

[58] Implies that he is a thorough dunce.

The Journey Back

BY A POET OF THE HAN DYNASTY

NAME UNKNOWN[59] (206 B.C. TO A.D. 220)

The journey back has now begun,
    The Chariot winds along the road—
The road which seems for aye to run
    To me with my sad load!

How vast the wilderness around,
    As o'er the endless track we pass;
The only moving thing and sound—
    The east wind through the grass!

The things I see are not the old,
    As mile on mile the way is won,
And quick as these things change are told
    Our years—and age comes on.

By nature's law each cycle brings
    A time to flourish and decay,
And, with her perishable things,
    We, too, must pass away.

No power have we with time to brave,
    As iron and stone, the grave's stern claim,
One treasure only can we save—
    An everlasting fame.

[59] The poet's name is unknown, but he (or she?) lived during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. to A.D. 220), or earlier.

The Gallant Captain and the Innkeeper's Wife

BY SIN YEN-NIEN

HAN DYNASTY (206 B.C. TO A.D. 220)

Among the near attendants of the famous General Ho,[60]
The Champion of the Emperor Wu and terror of his foe,
Was a gay and gilded youth of the name of Fung Tze-tu,
Who loved to slay the fair sex as the general did Hsiong-nu;
Presuming on his master's fame he bantered every girl,
And fancied he himself was great—he lived in such a whirl.
The landlord of the wine-shop was scarcely a man of means,
But had a young and pretty wife not yet out of her teens;
And with this charming lady Fung Tze-tu was wont to flirt;
But though so young and charming she was very much alert.
One day in Spring this hostess fair, in gracious serving mood,
Alone attended to the wants of guests for wine and food.
Attired in flowing skirt, and girdled loose with girlish wile,
Embroidered vest and wide-sleeved outer robe of ancient style;
Her slender head on either side with massive tresses graced,
And crowned with Lan-tien[61] jade, below with Ta-tsin[62] pearls enlaced:
This young and dainty figure, said the gallants with a sigh,
Was a sight with which no other on this earth could ever vie;
And as they posed before her in their elegant attire,
She deftly filled their glasses, and allowed them to admire.
Just as this dainty hostess stood alone within the inn,
Preparing special vintages selected from the bin,
Up rode a gay young officer with canopy of rank,
Accompanied by attendants afoot on either flank;
His charger's handsome trappings richly bound at every joint,
And silver-mounted saddle burnished to the flashing point,—
Alighting from his horse there stood the son of the Kin-Wu,[63]
The very gallant officer, the dashing Fung Tze-tu.

He called for wine in tasselled jug, and carp on golden plate,
And thought such lavish bravery the lady would elate;
Besides such show he offered her a mirror burnished bright,
Together with a red silk skirt of gauzy texture light;
All these, he thought, must surely daze the eyes of woman vain,
Who does not give her smiles for love, but for the greatest gain:
Alas! within the lady's mind quite other thoughts found vent,
More poignant when she spied within the red silk skirt a rent.
The rent within the skirt, she mused, no pang in you has wrought,
Nor would the loss of my good name cause you a serious thought;
For men soon tire of wives and seek their joys in faces new,
But wives are true to their first spouse and gallants do eschew;
Among the lowly born, as in the camp or royal abode,
Are women who are true to death to honour's stainless code:
I thank you for the favours shown, brave son of the Kin-Wu,
But this time you have loved in vain, my gallant Fung Tze-tu!

[60] General Ho K'ü-ping, died 117 B.C., Commander of the Armies of Han Wu Ti in several victorious campaigns against the Hsiung-nu.

[61] Lan-tien, a district in Shên-si, famous for its jade.

[62] Ta-tsin, the Roman Empire.

[63] A military officer of the Han Dynasty, holding a rank similar to that of Captain-General.

The Lady Chao-Chiün[64]

BY EO YANG SIU

SONG DYNASTY (A.D. 960-1278)

The Court of Han which shone with beauty rare
Of high-born women dowered with faces fair,
Had one within it, yet unknown to fame,
Of lowly fortune but of gentle name.

Now every flower had spared some hue or grace
To form Chao-Chiün's divinely lovely face;
But courtier's greed had barred the Palace gate,
Which Chao-Chiün's father would not try to sate.

Nor could the maid herself her beauty flaunt,
And hold her fair name light for gold or taunt;
Her Royal Master, therefore, did but jibe
At portraits of her, painted for a bribe.

And so this peerless girl was left alone,
Who might have shared Yüen's imperial throne.
But Yen-Show's greed at last itself betrayed,
And charges grave against him were arrayed;

Then traitor-like, as harried fox, or doe,
He fled the Court to help the Northern foe;
And with true portraits of the lovely maid,
He fired the Tartar Chief his plans to aid.

Abetted by this courtier, wise and arch,
The Tartar armies crossed the Emperor's march,
And devastated all the country near,
From which the people fled in piteous fear.

The Han King, conscious of his waning power,
Now sought for terms of peace in danger's hour;
And these were granted, if, with parlance brief
The Lady Wang would wed the Tartar chief.

But ere the peerless maiden left her home,
To brave the mountains and the desert roam,
The Emperor saw her, and his heart stood still,
Yet basely feared to thwart the Tartar's will.

The silence passed, he raved in passion's whirl,
And slew the painter who had limned the girl;
But useless were such puny acts, and cruel,
Which to a burning throne were added fuel.

For how could monarch, who perceived no more,
Of things which happened near his Palace door,
Expect to force the Hun to own his sway,
Encamped in strength a thousand miles away?

And so Chao-Chiün, beneath her weary load,
With royal guards began the endless road,
Watering with tears each lowly wayside flower,
The sport, alas! of beauty's fateful power.

[64] Chao-Chiün, or Wang Chao-Chiün, was a very beautiful girl who was precluded from entering the presence of the Emperor Yuan (Han Yuan Ti) by an avaricious courtier, Mao Yen-sheo, who bribed the court painter to present ugly portraits of Chao-Chiün to the Emperor, because her family would not pay the large sums of money he demanded. Afterwards Mao Yen-sheo's wiles became known to the Emperor, and he fled to the Khan of the Hsiung-nu to whom he showed a true portrait of Chao-Chiün. Thereupon the Khan invaded China with a great army, and demanded the Lady Chao-Chiün as the price of peace. Afraid to refuse, the Chinese Emperor surrendered Chao-Chiün to the Tartar chief who then retired beyond the Wall. According to a popular but untrustworthy version of this story, Chao-Chiün, when she reached the Heh-long Kiang (Amur River), jumped into the stream rather than cross the boundary which separated her from her native land.

Night on the Lake

BY SU TONG-PO

SONG DYNASTY (A.D. 960-1278)

The breeze is sighing through the water grass,
As up and down the narrow deck I pass;
And through the rarest mist of Autumn night
The rain-moon floods the lake with pallid light.

The boatmen and the water-fowl sleep sound,
And in their dreams see other worlds around;
The big fish startled sneak in haste away,
As flurried fox flees from the dawning day.

In depths of night it seems the human soul
Its sway o'er other things has lost control;
I and my shadow play upon the strand
That marks the boundary of the silent land.

We watch the secret tides in noiseless work,
Forming new isles where earthworms safely lurk;
And on the moon—a monstrous pearl—we gaze,
Looming through willow-trees in silver haze.

Amidst our life of changing grief and woe,
A glimpse of purer worlds will come and go,
As on this lake when nature's holy power
Speaks to us in the dark and silent hour.

But hark, the cock crows; rings the temple bell!
And birds awake in mountain, plain, and dell;
The guardship beats its drum, the boats unmoor,
While din and shouting on the hearer pour.

The Fishermen's Song

PRIZE POEM, BY CHENG-CHENG

T'SING DYNASTY

The sun is sinking in the west,
Bidding the fishermen think of rest.
'To-day,' they cry, 'no need to search,
The people rush to buy our perch;
Of shell-fish, too, we are bereft,
We've scarcely half a basket left!'
And at the piles of silver bright
They laugh, and shout, 'Good wine to-night!'
'We'll with the village wits combine
And drink our fill of "Luh-e"[65] wine;
Then if we feel inclined to roam,
The fisher-boys shall lead us home.'
So off they go to the evening meal,
And 'Luh-e' wine is drunk with zeal;
And after draining every glass,
They doff the fishers' coat of grass,
And with wild shouts a net they seize
And rush out in the evening breeze,
Intent on catching the mirrored moon,
Bright in the sea as the sun at noon.
Tricked by the moon to their hearts' content,
Shoreward they move on music bent;
The pipes of Pan, and flutes, come out,
Wine and music have a fine bout;
Voices and instruments combined
Soon leave no discord undefined!
After the shouting and the din
Even fishermen had to turn in;

So spreading their sails in a sandy cave,
And soothed by the sound of the lapping wave,
Tired and languorous the reveller yields
To sleep, and dreams of Elysian fields!

[65] 'Luh-e,' the name of a famous wine.

The Students' Ramble[66]

BY LU-TEH

T'SING DYNASTY

No longer could the blue-robed students cling
To essay, or angle, or such like thing;
The white-fleeced sky in depths of sapphire blue,
The mother-earth, in Spring's bewitching hue,
Enticed them forth to ponder fresher lore,
And gather strength from nature's boundless store,
So leaving college desk, and book, and file,
They tramp the green-robed country—mile on mile;
But resting oft within some shady nook,
By side of mountain rill or babbling brook.
The voice of streams, the sweet air after showers
On new-mown grass, and earth, and fragrant flowers;
The depths of space, the everlasting hills;
The unseen power that moves, and guides, and stills
All animated nature's varied life
And law reveals where all seemed useless strife—
Their sense enthralled, and coursing with their blood
Through every vein in strong impetuous flood—
Divine and human, on this radiant day,
Seemed nearer kin than even when we pray
In marble temples to the unknown God,
Or wayside fanes, by common people trod.
But homeward now reluctantly they turn,
Yet incense still to nature would they burn;
So as they wind through woods of pine-trees tall,
By willow-bordered streams where catkins fall,
Their pent-up feelings, buried deep and long,
Find voice in classic chants from ancient song.

As chorus sweet, and solo clear and rare,
Are wafted softly on the evening air,
The water-fowl on village ponds and streams
Are gently wakened from their summer dreams;
While mingled with the scholars' choral lay
The songs of peasants speed the closing day;
And bird, or insect,—each its anthem sings,
And little gift of praise to Heaven brings:
Then as the sun is sinking in the west,
And lighting up the regions of the blest,
From nature's altar falls the sacred fire,
And higher aims each student's heart inspire.

[66] This is a free translation, yet nearly every word is implied in the original. A crudely literal translation would not reveal the thoughts aroused in the mind of a Chinese reader of the poem.

The Priest of T'ien Mountain

BY LI TAI-PEH

T'ANG DYNASTY (A.D. 618-913)

I hear the distant baying of the hound
Amid the waters murmuring around;
I see the peach-flowers bearing crystal rain,
The sportive deer around the forest fane.

The waving tops of bamboo groves aspire
In fleeting change the summer clouds to tire,
While from the emerald peaks of many hills
The sparkling cascades fall in fairy rills.

Beneath the pines within this shady dell,
I list in vain to hear the noontide bell;[67]
The temple's empty, and the priest has gone,
And I am left to mourn my grief alone.

[67] The temple bell.

Maidens By the River-side

BY YUH YONG

THE NORTHERN WEI DYNASTY (A.D. 386-532)

Maidens robed in gauzy dresses,
Heads adorned with lustrous tresses,
Nestling pearls in soft caresses,
    Trip along the river-side.

Where the violet sweet reposes,
And the wild flowers group in posies,
Fairer than the queenly roses,
    Through the flowers they conquering glide.

Where the cooling water gushes,
Fitful shades of willow bushes
Flee and hide among the rushes,
    Lest the maidens should deride.

Tripping sylph-like, as the Graces,
East wind blowing on their faces,
Which it holds in soft embraces,
    And would ever there abide.

The Poet-Beggar

BY TAO TSIEN

T'SIN DYNASTY (A.D. 265-419)

Impelled by hunger, forth I strode,
But whither causing little care,
While feeling life's oppressive load—
Too great for me to bear.

At last your village here I reached,
By tramping many weary miles,
And knocking at an unknown door,
You welcomed me with smiles.

And when I roughly asked for food,
Gave meat and wine my need to sate,
And in a kind and friendly mood
You chatted while I ate.

Now having shared your generous cheer,
And drained the oft refillèd glass,
Revived and glad, unthanked I fear
To let such goodness pass.

A linen-bleacher, poor and old,
Fed Han-Sin,[68] sprung of royal breed,
From out her hard-earned scanty store
In time of darkest need.

Your kindly help to me this hour
Is fraught with equal love and grace,
Would I had Han-Sin's royal power,
Thy bounty to replace.

Alas! the fullness of my heart
My tongue can only lamely tell,
So now in simple verse I write
Of kindness done so well.

And though at last the muffled drum
Will beat the end of earthly days,
Throughout the cycles yet to come
My verse shall speak your praise.

[68] Han-Sin was the grandson of a prince of Han, whose State was annexed by the founder of the T'sin Dynasty. In early life Han-Sin suffered great poverty, and for some time was befriended by a poor woman who bleached flax. Afterwards he became the commander of the armies of Liu-Pang, the founder of the Han Dynasty, and regained his ancestral domain; he then sought out his friend, the flax-bleacher, and gave her 1,000 pieces of gold.

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